

Romans - Chapter Six

IV Romans 5:1-8:39 - Hope as a result of righteousness by faith (continues)

Summary of Chapter Six

Chapters 6-8 are designed both as a spectacular exposition of the Christian life in their own terms and as a way of taking forward the thrust of the whole letter, of which they form a central part.

Paul frames the account in similar terms to the Exodus, where God had heard his people Israel groaning under their bondage to slavery, (sin in Paul's letter); he sent Moses, (Jesus in Romans), to rescue them; he brought them out of the land of slavery by passing through the Red Sea, (Paul tells how baptism frees us from being slaves to sin, as explained in this chapter); the law was given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, (Paul discusses wrestling with problems of the law in Chapter 7); then God leads his people, (now the whole of creation according to Paul), into the Promised Land, (a life shared, i.e. in relationship with God, eventually to become eternal life on a renewed earth, which Paul looks at in Chapter 8).

There are three reasons why Paul has told it in this way:

1. Jesus is the fulfilment of the covenant promises made with Abraham, especially in Genesis Chapter 15. Romans Chapters 6-8 explain the fulfilment in some detail.
2. Many Jews of Paul's era expected a new Exodus, i.e. the coming of the Messiah to release them from foreign oppression, which was Rome in Paul's day. Paul agreed in principle with this concept but not in terms of the political Messiah that most Jews had expected, who would come to oppose Rome, for Paul tells of one that would liberate the whole of creation from the crushing burden of sin, thus offering true freedom for the first time since Adam.
3. What God has done in and through Jesus is the fulfilment of the hope of Israel, a work still in progress that is now being undertaken by the Holy Spirit and overseen by the Christ. The question that still remains unanswered, and which Paul will go on to look at in the beginning of Chapter 9, is: 'what are we to say about ethnic Israel?'

In this chapter, Paul looks almost exclusively at what it means for the Roman Christians to commit themselves to being followers of Jesus. He focuses on the problems that are caused by their inherent sinful nature that has such an impact on their lives, so that Paul likens it to their slave master. Paul also refutes the idea that the Gospel encourages people to sin so that God's grace may abound all the more; bringing glory to God in doing so.

Paul argues that their baptism into Christ should result in them casting off their former

inside. It draws them out of the world towards Christ but does not isolate or shield them completely from the world, due to their own selfish desires and nature. He then goes on to point out they are actually baptised, not into the life of Jesus, but into his death. By sharing in his death, they themselves, are freed now spiritually from the death that sin holds over them and, although one day they will die physically, they will remain spiritually alive through and in Christ. Finally, they are baptised into his resurrection that will, one day, lead them to being resurrected into the fullness of everlasting life, in the presence of God the Father.

They have but two choices in life: to be slaves to sin or to be slaves to obedience i.e. God. Although the language may not at first seem appealing, when explained it is clear the two options are poles apart. It should also be noted that the free gift does actually have a cost attached and that is obedience to God; for as was said at the outset, it is not a Gospel where the more you sin, the more God's grace will abound. There are two sides to the relationship, both has its responsibilities to the other. For Paul there is no third option for them to consider. By choosing to work for the master sin, their wages will be death - it has nothing else to offer. By choosing to give their life to God, the reward is a free gift of eternal life through Christ Jesus. A reward that could never be earned or owed, and can certainly never be matched.

At times I will refer to Jesus in this document where it might be more accurate to have used Christ or Messiah. The reason for this is that, in many ways, the individual Jesus of Nazareth no longer exists as a person but is now the embodiment of the Godhead and of God's whole creation; he is the anointed one of God, who rules and reigns by the dominion given to him by the Father for his total obedience, demonstrated in faith and through his death on the Cross. I often tend to use Jesus as I view my relationship as a personal one with the individual in his loving grace and mercy for me.

IV.c Romans 6:1-23 - The triumph of grace over the power of sin

The law does not and cannot conquer sin, but the grace given to followers of Christ triumphs over sin and death. In this chapter we have Paul's exhortations to holiness and his motives and arguments to enforce these motivations: where holiness is dying to sin and living to righteousness, putting off the old man (v.6) is not so much refraining from sin, but destroying the innate sinful nature. Freedom for the oppressed is freedom from the oppressor: <<There the wicked cease from turmoil, and there the weary are at rest. Captives also enjoy their ease; they no longer hear the slave driver's shout>> (Job 3:17-18).

IV.c.i Romans 6:1-14 - Dead to sin, alive in Christ

When we are baptised, we move from one form of humanity, those in sinful Adam, to another, those in the sin free Christ. When we do so, we begin to take on the full character of Christ, and we should have no thoughts or desires to go back to the way we once were. For those that have chosen to follow Christ, sin is no longer the driving force in their lives, nor does it have power over them anymore. Does this mean they will never sin again? Paul will explain this is not what is meant, for we are still weak in our sinful nature, but through Christ, by dying with him, being buried and then resurrected with him in this life, which is an act symbolised by baptism, we have made a commitment to shake off our sinful nature and to start living to, for and through Jesus. Day by day we should be able to turn away from sin and resist its evil hold over our lives that it once had, until we live to righteousness and can come to stand before him in the last days, spotless and pure, because of his sacrificial blood.

Living to righteousness is to walk in the newness of life, newness of heart, a change of mindset: <<Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will>> (Romans 12:2), living to and for God, living by God's will

themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will>> (2 Corinthians 8:5).

God demands nothing but our whole selves as he did of Paul at his conversion: <<"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do">> (Acts 9:6). Others who responded to the call were:

- **Abraham:** <<Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied>> (Genesis 22:1), and: <<But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied>> (Genesis 22:11), without a hint of hesitation on either occasion.
- **Moses:** <<When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am">> (Exodus 3:4).
- **Samuel:** <<Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am">> (1 Samuel 3:4).
- **Isaiah:** <<Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!">> (Isaiah 6:8).
- **Peter, Andrew, James and John:** <<So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him>> (Luke 5:11).
- **Philip:** <<The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me">> (John 1:43).
- **Matthew or Levi:** <<After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him>> (Luke 5:27-28).

IV.c.i.1 Romans 6:1-5 - Leaving the state of sin through baptism

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

Romans 6:1

What shall we say then links the earlier discourse from Chapter 5 in order to take Paul's argument forward. If sin makes grace abound, should we sin more to make it abound even more? If the rising level of sin means that God's gracious power has to be extended all the more in order to counter and overwhelm that sin, then sin is good for God and for the Gospel! The logic is obvious, and has a sought of perverse attraction. Since sin gives God the opportunity to manifest this generosity to man, sin cannot be such a bad thing at all. Paul exclaims: 'God forbid', or by no means! (v.2), in a similar way to which Jesus had said: <<Away from me, Satan!>> during his temptation (Matthew 4:10b).

Paul is most likely responding to a question posed regularly by his Jewish opponents. They did not raise this question so that they would have an excuse to sin, although in every age some have wrongly interpreted and applied Paul's Gospel of grace to rationalise sin. Instead, Paul's opponents argued that his Gospel must be mistaken since, in their view, it led people to go on sinning. Paul will now show why their interpretation of his Gospel is mistaken. Any opinion that gives any countenance to sin, or opens a door to practical immoralities, however specious and plausible they may appear, by the pretence of advancing free grace, are to be rejected with the greatest abhorrence, for the truth as it is in Jesus is: <<a knowledge of truth that leads to godliness>> (Titus 1:1), and: <<Because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever>> (2 John 1:2).

Paul, by placing the law on the side of sin and not grace in Romans 5:20, poses the question: 'did God give the law so that sin would increase and grace abound?' The Jew would naturally challenge this concept, but could not help but see that grace stands alone as a gift of God, irrespective of whether you have the law or not

² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Romans 6:2

We are all a living sacrifice: <<Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship>> (Romans 12:1). Paul's Gospel does not lead to more sin, since those who belong to Christ have died to sin. On its own, this statement may have seemed strange to the Roman congregation, for the concept only appears in Pauline letters, e.g. <<For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God>> (Galatians 2:19), and: <<For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died>> (2 Corinthians 5:14). There were a few people in Rome that had received Paul's teaching and so may have informed others of these concepts, but Paul will go on to unpack the concept for us in some depth in the following four verses, in order to give greater understanding. The decisive point, however, is that Christ's death and resurrection has brought about a new stage in God's dealing with humanity. The law belongs primarily, along with sin, to the era of Adam; but Christ has introduced a new era. As a freely embraced act of obedience, not simply a consequence of man's disobedience: <<For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous>> (Romans 5:19), Christ's death marked the end of the reign of sin and death, and so also of the law as sin's cohort. Consequently, the implication is fairly clear, even before we move on from v.2, that the dying to sin here spoken of is not something independent of Christ, but is somehow a sharing in his death, a sharing in his transition from one era to the other. For the devout Jew, the logic of grace was the law as God's provision against sin. For the believer in Jesus, the logic of grace is identification with one whose life is simply beyond sin.

The laying off of our sinful nature released us from the bondage of slavery. Once Christ leads us out of Egypt, should we ever consider returning?

³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?

Romans 6:3

Baptism is a life changing event in which the person comes out of the water as if they were a new creation; and there is no going back to the old. Christians died to sin when they were baptised into Christ. Paul is not arguing that baptism magically destroys the power of sin. Baptism is an outward, physical symbolic act, representative of the inward, spiritual conversion of Christians. Jesus baptism was into death: <<"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?">> (Mark 10:38), and: <<But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!>> (Luke 12:50), which is what followers of his are really being baptised into, rather than his baptism by John: <<As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased">> (Mark 1:10-11).

Elsewhere, Paul writes on this subject: <<For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink>> (1 Corinthians 12:13). The most obvious way of understanding this is that Paul himself knew and made use of the same metaphor on his own account: <<we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body>>. When such a usage, so closely parallel to v.3, was so widely known in early Christian tradition, it hardly seems necessary to look further afield for the point of contact with his readers, which Paul assumes in v.3. As Paul clearly implies elsewhere, the initiating experience of the Spirit was usually very vivid, an event often deeply moving and profoundly transforming, which the young Christians would have no difficulty in recalling. For example: <<And hope does not disappoint us, because God has

poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us>> (Romans 5:5), <<Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God>> (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), <<Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come>> (2 Corinthians 1:21-22), <<Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing – if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?>> (Galatians 3:3-5), and: <<You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit>> (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

Certainly, Paul would take it for granted that all believers were bonded together by a common experience of grace: <<For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ>> (Romans 5:17), <<I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge>> (1 Corinthians 1:4-5), <<But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me>> (1 Corinthians 15:10), <<As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain>> (2 Corinthians 6:1), and: <<I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel>> (Galatians 1:6), by a common participation in the one Spirit: <<For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink>> (1 Corinthians 12:13), <<All the saints send their greetings>> (2 Corinthians 13:13), <<If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion>> (Philippians 2:1), and: <<Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace>> (Ephesians 4:3). It is probably his readers' experience of this grace, of this Spirit, to which Paul here refers, using a metaphor whose familiarity he could equally take for granted.

We were baptised into his death: <<They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea>> (1 Corinthians 10:2), and as he died to redeem us from iniquity, so we must die to sin, and to self, that we may know the fellowship of his sufferings: <<I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death>> (Philippians 3:10). Death on the Cross is a long but sure death, a painful death, a cursed death: <<Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" >> (Galatians 3:13), but our offering is an old man to be crucified, old and decaying due to the effects of a life of sinful thoughts and deeds, dying in order to spring forth into new covenant: <<By calling this covenant 'new', he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear>> (Hebrews 8:13).

But how is Paul asking his readers to identify with this post-Cross Jesus, for he is now a person who transcends our concept of a person as 'individual', the person of Jesus Christ no longer a three-dimensional focus of reference. Just as Wisdom or the Word of God, which is the power of God diffused throughout the cosmos, could be conceived in Jewish thought as a personification, in personal terms, so conversely Christ, by his resurrection set free from the constraints of a three dimensional existence, could be conceived as a personal power

conceptualisation seems to be presupposed in Paul's well known 'in Christ' and 'body of Christ' language, as the Spirit of God: <<You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you>> (Romans 8:9-11), << But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit>> (1 Corinthians 6:17), and: <<So it is written: " The first man Adam became a living being" ; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit>> (1 Corinthians 15:45); and, although he has not yet made any attempt to use such language up to this point in this letter, it is difficult to imagine that he was not thinking in these terms, which is confirmed in the parallel passage in Galatians 3:7, where he speaks of 'putting on Christ'. We do not need to call on the later conception of an archetypal man in heaven, fragmented in the multiplicity of human beings, or of a mystical absorption into the deity, in order to establish the point that we are dealing here with a more fluid concept of personality. At the least it would mean that Paul understood the power which moved upon and within him and his fellow believers as having a personal character, which was the character of Christ, of Christ crucified and risen; to experience this power was to experience life on the far side of the Cross, to share in the life of him who died and rose again.

The condemnation of all in the present age is that we follow through and reproduce Adam's sin, and therefore it follows that we must die Adam's death, i.e. spiritual separation from God and ultimately the physical death of the body. The Gospel is that, although we too will share in Adam's physical death, but we can share also in Christ's, with all the benefits that brings to us spiritually and eternally. We could consider it in this way: Jesus is the only one who, having reached the end of this age of Adam broke through the final barrier of death into a new age beyond. Jesus' death and resurrection thus provide the doorway, for Paul the only doorway, through death to life, from this age under the power and curse of sin to the new age free from the burden of sin. To make the transition from old age to new age, from sin through death to life, we must, as it were, be carried through by Christ, and we must identify ourselves unreservedly with the historical event of Jesus' death in all its degradation, ignominy, curse and suffering, as sacrificial offering and act of obedience. Only those who make themselves one with his death can hope to experience the life which is in the new age beyond.

Following baptism we become a new person in Christ, the person that God can truly love. We should refrain from saying that God loves all sinners, as this can misrepresent God and give non-believers a false sense of hope; what God loves is the person they could become once they have been changed through this baptism of death with Christ, i.e. accepting Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour.

⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Romans 6:4

In the early church, baptism was probably by full bodily immersion, at least as a general rule, although Christians dispute whether such a practice must always be followed literally today. After all, burials were not always underground, so the idea probably arose out of the discussions of death as denoting the finality of death, rather than from the mode of baptism: <<For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures>> (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), and the failure to follow through the symbolism to speak of

the association of ideas. Alternatively, through baptism could denote the means by which the would-be follower of Jesus identified himself or herself with Christ in his death; the surrendering of ourselves to the baptiser in full bodily immersion could well be seen as symbolising and expressing the necessary surrender to Christ in death, and as a public act it would often mean a very real renunciation of the ties and friendships of the old life, of the life in the age of Adam. Either way, the event of baptism would usually have been the focus for the most effective meeting of divine grace and human faith.

Therefore, baptism pictures a person being buried with Christ, i.e. submersion under water, and being raised to new life with Christ, i.e. the re-emergence from the water. This symbolises the person's union with, and incorporation into, Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit. Hence, they now have the power to live in new life. Israel had recognised the concept of new life following Babylonian exile: <<Though we are slaves, our God has not deserted us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem>> (Ezra 9:9), but now he offers spiritual new life.

When Jesus was resurrected to new life he left his grave cloths behind: <<Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen>> (John 20:6-7), as he would have no further need of them ever again, as death no longer had a hold on him, and he is alive forever: <<but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood>> (Hebrews 7:24). Others raised to life prior to Christ would need their grave cloths again, e.g. Lazarus: <<The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go" >> (John 11:44), because they would again die physically.

In the second part of this verse, Paul jumps from a deep theological concept to talk of daily conduct. For Paul, evidently, the character of daily conduct is actually determined by these deeper realities, the hidden self-understanding and sources of strength, which come to expression in day to day living. The proof of such deeper realities is not some profound mystical experience, but the daily decisions of everyday relationships and responsibilities. His readers, who were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, would have taken the point that Paul intends here in contrast with the typical Jewish understanding that daily conduct should be determined by the law. Paul refutes the idea that grace makes moral responsibility superfluous. He also refutes the hidden premise that such conduct means walking 'in the law'. In the new age and covenant it is the renewed life which is the source and motivation of ethical living.

⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

Romans 6:5

Paul starts to set up a tension here, a tension between the degree of self-identification, possible with Jesus' death, and the degree of self-identification, possible with Jesus' resurrection: a key element in the now but not yet of the Kingdom of God. It is this tension which is at the basis of Christian ethics and conduct, and is the key to understanding the way Paul develops his argument throughout the next three chapters.

Death has no dominion over Christ: <<I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades>> (Revelation 1:18), and should hold no fear for those who die to Christ, although the manner of our death may bring some apprehension. But in this life we must rise from the grave of sin never to return to it again.

We will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. The future tense of this expression is important as Paul is not just looking back at an historic event that happened more than twenty years before he wrote this letter. Instead, he writes it in a way that links the events of the past, takes them through the present and on into the future. The believer has been and still is bonded together with the effect of Jesus' death, with the actual outworking of the death that he died, which in effect means he has been crucified with Jesus, crucified in relationship to the world, and still hangs there: <<I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me>> (Galatians 2:20), and: <<May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world>> (Galatians 6:14). Here then is the final goal of the state or process of assimilation to Jesus' death, the future resurrection, the redemption of the body: <<And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you>> (Romans 8:11), <<Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies>> (Romans 8:23), and: <<I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead>> (Philippians 3:10-11).

Here the tension already referred to becomes much clearer. The whole of this life for the believer is suspended between Jesus' death and his resurrection, or more precisely, between the conversion of a believer, which began the process, and the resurrection of the body, which will complete it. The very real dying of believers is a lifelong process: they do not sever all links and relationships with this world, although some have tried with varying degrees of success, although many of the documented attempts do not seem to fit well with the Gospel message, until the death of the body. How can they? But in the meantime they must let the death of Jesus come to increasing effect in their own lives. Only as believers live in the consciousness that they belong to the one who has died completely to this world, only as they identify themselves in Jesus in that effect of Christ's death and resurrection in their present lives, only then can they hope to share fully in the completion of the process in the resurrection of the body like Christ's.

IV.c.i.2 Romans 6:6-11 - Dead to sin; alive to God

⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin —

Romans 6:6

The power of sin has been broken in those who believe, for their old self, i.e. old man, meaning those who they were in Adam, was crucified and put to death with Christ. They were born into the world as sinners, with the result that their bodies were ruled by sin.

Body of sin refers to the rule of sin, but without excluding the involvement of the personal self that lives through the body. Sin's rule, however, was broken when Christians died with Christ, and therefore they are no longer slaves to sin. Paul does not argue that Christians do not sin at all, a view called sinless perfection; instead, the tyranny, domination, and rule of sin have been broken in them and defeated for them. This means that the normal pattern of life for Christians should be progressive growth in sanctification, resulting in ever greater maturity and conformity to God's moral law in thought and action.

⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Romans 6:7

Freed from sin appears as justified from sin in some translations, e.g. ASV.

With vv.6-7, the tension in Paul's conception of present Christian existence becomes sharper and likely to cause some confusion. It is clear enough that our 'old man' and the 'body of sin' in v.6 both refer to humanity in solidarity with Adam, our belongingness to the old era, the age dominated by the power of sin. Does Paul then turn his back on the idea of the believer's identification with Jesus in his death as a lifelong process? Does he mean his readers to understand that their attachment to the present world was already completely ended? That they have been crucified, destroyed, and have died? And does he therefore mean that the believer as such is in fact free from sin and so sinless? One answer might be that he did not intend the two verses to be read quite so abruptly. To nail someone to the cross is not to kill them there and then, but to subject him to a suffering which inevitably resulted in death after some hours or even days; might be done away with in v.6 could be rendered 'might be made ineffective, or powerless', or to be taken to describe the end result of the crucifixion, in the believer's case, is that Paul does seem to be looking back to the believer's having died with Christ as something already accomplished; moreover, the logic of v.6 is that the liberation from sin's slavery is the consequence of the body of sin's destruction and 'freed or justified from sin' sounds even less like Paul than 'declared free from sin'.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.
⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.

Romans 6:8-9

If we died with Christ. Only Jesus has experienced the full effect of death, and has then escaped the power of death, but only by virtue of being raised from the dead; only of him is it true that he has died to sin once and for all, that the stimulus of sin finds no response. It is clear enough also that believers are not yet living with Christ; from the standpoint of faith, death with Christ lies in the past, whereas to live with him lies in the future; however much they share in Jesus' death, they do not yet share in his resurrection. This may seem in some ways to leave us in no-man's land. We are no longer the old creation in Adam but not yet with Christ. However, Paul will later on coin the phrase 'in Christ'. This gives a bit of an understanding of where we are in reality. This is a state that some people feel uncomfortable with, especially those who have been followers of Jesus for many years and have perhaps forgotten what it was like to live without knowing his love and lordship over our lives. We may find that we are drawn back to sin and perhaps wonder about our own salvation, thinking of words like: <<No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him>> (1 John 3:6). We may ask, 'How can I be a Christian yet act as I do, or say the things I do, or do not do what I know I should?' But we are a new creation, there is no turning back, if indeed we meant and believed what we said at baptism and acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Saviour. We belong to Christ. When we get it wrong, we must come back to the foot of the Cross and ask for his forgiveness with genuine resolve not to continue in our old dead life of sin.

Jesus was raised from the dead and later on left this world: <<It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love>> (John 13:1), and: <<I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name — the name you gave me — so that they may be one as we are one>> (John 17:11), to go to the Father in order to intercede for us, both during the remainder of our earthly lives and when we leave this world to join him. Therefore, he is there for us now and the Father will accept our prayers offered in His name and, if our prayer is to remain in Him, in His righteousness, we

through God and in God.

Of course, we are not yet bodily raised as one day we shall be. That remains in the future. That future is secure and certain: <<And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you>> (Romans 8:11). Paul will argue this in much further detail throughout 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, but it remains in the future none the less. But part of the point of being a Christian is that the future has come forward into the present in the person and achievement of Jesus, so that his followers already taste the reality of that future, while living in the present; the now and not yet of the kingdom of God. The Christian stands on Resurrection ground, just as Moses had stood on Holy ground (Exodus 3:5, Acts 7:33). We are not 'in Adam', we are 'in Christ', the one who died and is now alive for evermore.

¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Romans 6:10

Died to sin. Jesus died because he took sin upon himself, but his resurrection demonstrates that he has defeated both sin and death.

He lives to God. In an important sense Jesus' death and resurrection as obedient Adam counts for all mankind who were of the first Adam: Christ died for all, therefore all died: <<For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died>> (2 Corinthians 5:14); Jesus died in the solidarity of sinful flesh, as a sin offering: <<For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man>> (Romans 8:3), therefore the body of sin has been done away with. Something of epochal significance has happened in the once for all aspect of Jesus' death.

The point that Paul wishes to get across, even at the risk of overstatement, is that believers can share in the epochal once for all results of Jesus' death. By the decisive act of conversion, believers can begin already, even in this life, to benefit from the decisive act of Jesus' death and resurrection. Their transition from death to life is incomplete, they are suspended, as it were, between death and life, they are lying buried with Jesus in death to sin, awaiting the fullness of the resurrection, they are still to that extent under the dominion of death until they too have been raised from the dead, and death ceases to exercise any rule over them. But the crucial transition has begun. Because they already share in the once for all aspect of Jesus' death to sin they can be sure their final dying will escape the sting of death: <<The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law>> (1 Corinthians 15:56); because they have already opened themselves in a decisive act of faith to the life-giving power of the risen Lord Jesus, they can believe with confidence that they will, one day, share fully in that life.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:11

Count yourselves is often translated as reckon and many Christians like to read this verse in a sense that we have left our life of sin behind and now live, or should live, in a life of utopian bliss, but life is not like that in reality. NT Wright gives a helpful analogy: 'The word he uses is a word used in bookkeeping, in calculating accounts, in working out profit and loss figures. Now, of course, when you do a calculation you get an answer which, in a sense, didn't exist before. But in another sense, all that calculation does is to make you aware of what, in fact, was true all along. It doesn't create a new reality. Until you add up the money in the till,

day's takings a penny larger or smaller than they already are. Paul tells us to do the same sums, to add up, to work out the calculation - not to screw up our spiritual courage for a fresh leap of faith in which we imagine ourselves to be actually sinless. And here is the point. It is often hard to believe the result of the calculation. But faith, at this point, consists, not of shutting one's eyes to the reality of Jesus and his representative death and resurrection - and to the reality of one's own standing as a baptised and believing member of Jesus' people, those who are 'in the Messiah'. That is the challenge of verse 11. We need to remember who we really are, so that we can act accordingly'.

Dead to sin means dead to the pervasive love for and the ruling power of sin. Christians must realise that the mastery of sin has been broken in their lives; see comment on v.6.

Believers need to live their lives in this world as those who do indeed share in Jesus' death, not yet fully liberated from the power of death, but no longer in bondage to sin, as those who draw their vital energies and motivations from God in Christ Jesus. It is this basic identification with Jesus in his death, accepted in the decisive act of conversion, which provides the starting point for the exhortations that follow.

IV.c.i.3 Romans 6:12-14 - The call to holy living

¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

Romans 6:12-13

The tension surfaces here between what God has already accomplished and the responsibility of his people to obey. They are still tempted by desires to sin and must not let those desires gain control. Each day they must give themselves afresh to God.

For believers who recognise the epochal significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, however, that need no longer be the case. Even though their life within this present physical and social environment, i.e. your mortal body, is not yet under the power of the Risen Lord Jesus, nevertheless the inescapable urge to satisfy their appetites, i.e. its evil desires, need no longer be their master. Here, the same eschatological tension is clearly implied. For believers, the body is still mortal, its appetites still capable of determining their life's character and priorities. But the power of grace, the power of the Risen Lord, enables them to rise above such merely self-centred concerns. It is this reality that Paul seeks to realise in his readers; hence the sequence of imperatives. Paul is under no delusion that it will happen automatically, as though conversion had worked an irreversible transformation, which would inevitably manifest itself in daily life. Believers have a responsibility in all this; a responsibility to let the power of grace come to expression in their lives. Moral effort is in no way antithetical to faith; it is rather the outworking and expression of faith.

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin. Paul's thought still focuses on the physicality, since it is their bodily belongingness to the world, which is the clearest evidence that the work of grace is not yet complete. If the power of Jesus' risen life can manifest itself in the totality of these bodily relationships, then the total victory of grace is all the more assured. But so long as they are in this body there is the very real likelihood that particular deeds and actions will advance the cause of unrighteousness, even that there will be an area of the believer's life, which is habitually in the service of sin.

As always, believers do have a choice. They can choose to put themselves fully at God's disposal and make a full commitment to kingdom life on earth, or they can drift along, content in the knowledge of their own salvation. Each act involving moral choice is an act of

realised ever afresh, even daily as stated before. The once for all commitment of conversion to being a follower of Jesus does not keep individual actions thereafter from being determined by selfish motives. It is only when each act is done for God, as something which God can use to further his purpose for mankind's well-being that believers can be confident that they are walking in the newness of life.

¹⁴ For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Romans 6:14

Sin shall not be your master. This is not a command but a promise that sin will not triumph in the lives of Christians. Because they live in the new era of fulfilment, they are no longer under the old era of redemptive history; that is, they are no longer under law, where the Mosaic Law and sin ruled over God's people. By contrast, under grace means living under the new covenant in Christ, in an era characterised by grace: <<and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus>> (Romans 3:24), <<Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all>> (Romans 4:16), <<through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God>> (Romans 5:2), and: <<But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord>> (Romans 5:15-21).

Because you are not under law. The basic perspective from which Paul wants his readers to view their lives is posed by Paul as the alternative of grace over against law. The reintroduction of the law to the discussion might at first have seemed surprising; the exposition so far in this chapter has been more or less exclusively in terms of sin and death. But evidently, the law was never far from Paul's thoughts as he dictated his exposition to Tertius, which is a further reminder that Paul, as a devout Jew and Pharisee, considered that the law played an integral role in the process of salvation. What is striking is that, once again, the law is put on what, to the great majority of devout Jews, would seem to be the wrong side of the antithesis. For Paul, being under the law is bound up with being under the mastery of sin, with giving control at different points to unrighteousness; with obeying the desires of the mortal body. Such an association would have astonished most of Paul's fellow Jews. For them, the law was given by the grace of God precisely to prevent sin, a bulwark against unrighteousness, as a means of coping with the uncleanness of the body. But for Paul's life, under the law was, on the contrary, a life bound more closely with sin. Paul will take up the whole of Romans Chapter Seven looking at the effects of God's law and how it relates to the new life offered in and through Christ.

Here, for the first time in this letter, Paul depicts the law as a power over man. As his earlier usage indicates, the phrase for him characterises the people of Israel, the Jews, as a nation. Before this faith came, we were held captive by the law, locked up until faith

should be revealed>> (Galatians 3:23), <<But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons>> (Galatians 4:4-5), and: <<To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law>> (1 Corinthians 9:20). His point is that, far from being a beneficial power for the Jewish people, the law had been a rather baneful influence. Perhaps he had in his mind too, that to see the relationship with God in terms of the law is to open the door to the dominant attitude, either of anxious self-scrutiny: <<For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father">> (Romans 8:15), or of fault-finding scrupulosity: <<The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles. So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?" He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men">> (Mark 7:1-8).

In any case, we must assume that Paul, in looking back on his life as a Pharisee, had long ago concluded that the law, far from binding individuals closer to God in truthful obedience, actually separated them from him, and prevented them from accepting God's grace in its complete gratuitousness, i.e. without works of the law. Over against the Jewish concept of a national righteousness understood in terms of the law, Paul poses once again the universal offer of righteousness understood in terms of grace from start to finish.

IV.c.ii Romans 6:15-23 - Slaves to righteousness

The question posed in v.1 is now explored from another angle, that is, shall a Christian continue to sin because sin's power over him is broken (v.11), and thus there is little danger in sinning?

Paul often writes of his faults: <<For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God>> (1 Corinthians 15:9), and: <<Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief>> (1 Timothy 1:13); even though he was pious in his life to God, he realised how sinful and even obnoxious he was to God. Where does that leave the likes of the rest of us? But it is good for us to remember what we were before we were called, and perhaps even after we were called, and to reflect on what we have done in the past, in order to remind ourselves just how far along the journey the grace of Jesus has brought us.

IV.c.ii.1 Romans 6:15-19 - The two types of slavery

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

Romans 6:15

Paul emphatically rejects the idea that freedom from the old covenant era of being under law implies freedom to sin. Paul clearly finds it offensive that because we are no longer under law but under grace that this gives us licence to sin. Matthew Henry writes that it is: 'to spit in the face of such love'. It may provide a disgusting image, but it describes accurately just how

foot of the Cross! But the repetition of the question posed in v.1 also echoes the surprise and bewilderment any good Jew would have felt at Paul's disparagement of the law. To set the law over against grace like that was a recipe for moral disaster; to put grace alone in place of the law was to remove God's barrier against sin and means of dealing with sin, and to open the floodgates of sin, or so the pious Jew would argue.

¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Romans 6:16

The awkward phasing of this verse is probably, in part at least, Paul's attempt once again to strike the right balance between the already now and the not yet of the Kingdom of God. But he also wants to finally qualify that the Gospel in no way promotes sin for any reason whatsoever.

The one whom you obey. We can be a slave to sin or a servant of God through Jesus. In essence, building the right relationship with God does not establish us in a totally sin free state. Nor does it mean that the relationship will breakdown, be denied or destroyed due to the act of any particular sin. It is a relationship that can be sustained despite individual acts of disobedience; in a master-slave relationship, the master can tolerate and forgive various breaches of discipline, although habitual, deliberate, persistent, and especially unrepentant sinning will presumably destroy the relationship itself, or perhaps indicate that the relationship was never established by the slave in the first place, who chose instead to remain with his previous master, i.e. as a slave to sin. What is implicit here is that man cannot be independent; that the person who refuses God's mastery over himself or herself does not thereby achieve independence, but becomes instead, or more appropriately remains, a slave to sin. Evidently, for Paul, there is no third alternative. The choice confronting everyone is the choice of being ruled by God or being ruled by sin. There is a moral decision to be made.

Moral decisions still matter for Christians; giving in to sin results in people becoming increasingly obedient slaves to sin. This kind of activity eventually leads to death, not implying that genuine believers can actually lose their salvation, but that sinning leads them in that direction, away from full enjoyment of life with Christ. In the Galatian churches, some men, probably zealous Jews who had become Christians in part, tried to get the Galatian Christians, both Jew and Gentile, to come to Jesus through the law of Moses. Paul wrote to the Galatians: <<You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace>> (Galatians 5:4). On that occasion Paul was not discussing the question of whether a genuine believer can lose his or her salvation. He was only saying that people, who may once have made a profession of faith that if they now are truly seeking to be justified by the law, must not really have had a relationship with Christ in the first place; they have fallen away from the grace that was so freely offered and made available to them. Paul makes no similar claim here though with his comments on becoming slaves to sin. Those who give themselves utterly to sin will die, i.e. face eternal punishment.

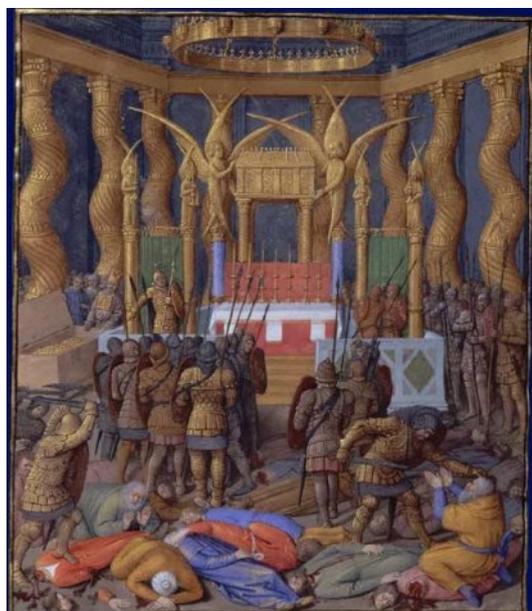
Leads to death, leads to righteousness. There is only one, our Creator God, who has the power to give life after the body is dead, whether spiritually or physically. Being a slave to sin kills the body and the mind long before physical death occurs. Choosing to be a slave to whom you obey, i.e. a slave of the obedience to God, provides spiritual life both before and after physical death. And both the life before and after physical death can be lived in the fullness of a relationship with God through Jesus. It is this relationship with God which leads to righteousness. For Paul, this is not some passive relationship with God; it involves, indeed it demands obedience to God alone.

¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Romans 6:17-18

Many people proclaim that Christ is freedom. Paul, in fact, has stated that it is freedom, through Christ, from the law given by God to Moses. This alarmed the Jews as they interpreted it as a licence to sin, which Paul has already refuted. An interesting analogy given by NT Wright is that passing the driving test gives you 'the freedom of the road', which does not mean freedom to break the Road Traffic Act, to speed, to drive recklessly, not wear a seatbelt or use your handheld mobile phone while driving. This freedom is still under the law of the land. The freedom we enjoy in and through Christ is a freedom from the mastery of sin and a freedom to obey God's will and to follow the teachings of Christ, which is a completely different kind of freedom to anything else. Thus Paul likens it as being slaves to righteousness.

Many Roman residents were or had been slaves. The majority of Roman Jews had been taken into slavery by the Emperor Pompey in 61BC, after his great successes throughout the Middle



East. Many of the Jews had subsequently purchased their freedom and the difference in their lives was tremendous. For their descendants reading this letter, the terminology of slavery would have been thought provoking, and the idea of having a new found freedom in Christ would have been uplifting to say the least. However, Paul did not just want to leave them with the idea they had been simply moved from one master to another without some say in the matter. Coming to Christ is always a matter of human choice. The offer is made and the conditions set. We then choose to accept or decline it accordingly.

The image is of Pompey ransacking the Temple in Jerusalem as portrayed by the 15th Century French artist Jean Fouquet.

True Christians, however, will never live as slaves to sin, for God has transformed their lives at conversion, so that they will now grow in their love of righteousness and in living according to God's Word, i.e. they have wholeheartedly obeyed God. As a Pharisaic Jew, Paul would have wholeheartedly obeyed the law of God, but his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road had led him to find a much deeper meaning to this obedience with God; faith that had changed him from within, a circumcision of the heart: <<Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done – burn with no one to quench it>> (Jeremiah 4:4).

The form of teaching to which you were entrusted refers to obedience to Jesus' words, who had brought such great teaching that Paul had received, either second hand or most probably divinely, and which would have been handed down faithfully by apostles and disciples to all the new churches: <<We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ>> (Romans 15:1-6). <<Follow my example, as I

follow the example of Christ>> (1 Corinthians 11:1), <<So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him>> (Colossians 2:6), <<Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus>> (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2), and: <<In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us>> (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

We are blessed that we now have them in written form in the NT. It also alludes to the Holy Spirit, whom we received when we accepted Jesus as our Lord and who is now there to guide and teach us, if we are prepared to listen to him: <<Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground>> (Psalm 143:10), <<"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say" >> (Luke 12:11-12), <<But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you>> (John 14:26), and: <<But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come>> (John 16:13).

Paul spoke much earlier of the problem of Adamic humanity being located not least in the human heart: <<For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another>> (Romans 1:21-24). Now, although he has not yet explained this in the present letter, Paul envisages Christians as people who have been transformed from within. There is a fundamental willingness to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

The early Christians developed certain basic traditions:

- **About the Gospel itself:** <<For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born>> (1 Corinthians 15:3-8);
- **About the Lord's Supper or Eucharist:** <<For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes>> (1 Corinthians 11:23-26);
- **About behaviour:** <<Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more>> (1 Thessalonians 4:1), and this present passage.

They would have no doubt have learned several other things as well. These rules of thumb set out a framework for belief and behaviour, a family code of practice. Paul was primarily

became members of the family of God, as hundreds and perhaps thousands did in the churches that Paul had planted or where he ministered, something happened to them deep down inside, which made them want to live in line with this community to which they now belonged. Of course, it would take teaching and moral effort; it always does and always will. But the will was there, and Paul thanked God for it.

Any new movement calling for a fundamental shift in allegiance is bound to provide new converts with some guidelines regarding lifestyle and behaviour. For the first Christians there could be no better exemplar than Jesus himself. Whereas the proselyte to Judaism would have been directed to the law, for Paul, himself a converted Jew, there was now a different norm and model of obedience; no longer the law, but Christ Jesus his Lord. Christ's ministry in whole, and in part, embodied the grace of God, and so provided a clear enough pattern of teaching for those who are not under the law but under grace: <<But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!>> (Romans 5:15), and: <<For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich>> (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Paul reminds his readers and the rest of us: you used to be slaves to sin. This helps to keep us humble, penitent and watchful. There is nothing worse than having a prideful complacency in our apparent sinless state as followers of Jesus, for such a state does not exist. Conversion is conformity to, and compliance with, the Gospel of grace, and a call to be obedient from the heart. The Gospel is not just there to be believed but to be obeyed.

Being freed from the yoke of sin, we become servants of righteousness and of God, whose yoke is not burdensome: <<Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" >> (Matthew 11:29-30), and under which we find rest and innermost peace. We are not freed from sin to be our own masters, we must allow Jesus to be Lord of all aspects of our being and lives; we cannot serve two masters: <<"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money">> (Luke 16:13). Especially two so diametrically opposed as God and Satan. If we do not overtly give ourselves to God's service then we unintentionally serve Satan. Paul doesn't mention Satan at this point but, in his song 'Gotta Serve Somebody' Bob Dylan does, for the chorus states:

You're gonna have to serve somebody,
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

If you find the song on YouTube, you will see that Bob Dylan writes about all sorts of people in various walks of life, especially the powerful and wealthy, and, although he alludes to them being served in their own lives, he goes on to claim they have to serve somebody too. There is no middle ground. You are either in Adam or in Christ!

I had a recent conversation with a Christian friend in his early twenties, who said that he had a tension in his life. He wanted to join people of his own age at a night club or at a lively party, but was afraid that, to do so, might cause him to lose his credibility of witness among non-Christians who knew of his proclamation of faith to Jesus. I reminded him of what Jesus had taught us: <<The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full>> (John 10:10). The Christian life is meant to be fun, and for us to enjoy and celebrate what God has given us, in great abundance and so freely in this life, is actually a good Christian witness to those non-Christians who know us. This is especially true if a young person can show their non-Christians peers that they can have a great time without losing control through too much

alcohol consumption, without the need to take illegal chemical or biological substances to stimulate them, for the Holy Spirit is the greatest stimulant to life there is, and that, at the end of the night, they don't end up going to bed with a complete stranger, or anyone else other than their own husband or wife. I believe it is a much more credible witness for Christ for any of us to show what a great and enjoyable life we have in service to him.

¹⁹ I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.

Romans 6:19

I put this in human terms because you are weak. Paul is all too aware of the tendency of his readers to still behave as if they were slaves to sin. Yes, they had a new pattern for life; yes, they had been transferred to obedience in God; but they still had a tendency toward their old selfish lifestyle, i.e. your natural selves, and had to realise that living in obedience to God takes a daily commitment to live in accordance with the new relationship they had so freely entered into. They could not just expect God to pour out his grace upon them without some commitment coming from their side as well.

Putting things in human terms can help us with useful analogies. God does not set up kingdom rules of obedience for the fun of it; to inconvenience or punish us; or just because he can. He does so for our benefit and not for his own amusement. Think of it in terms of a journey. In life we sometimes ignore the road signs and turn into a cul-de-sac, having thought it was a short cut. At other times we may ignore signs that will actually lead us into disaster. But if, in the main, we follow the rules, we will not go far wrong and will eventually reach our destination in one piece. Unlike the typical human journey, we will also arrive in a better shape than we were in when we set out on the journey initially. This does not mean, of course, that we will never have encountered road works, mechanical breakdowns or even accidents on the way! That is why perseverance is so frequently the watchword of Paul and other teachers of the Gospel.

Although Paul acknowledges that the illustration from slavery is imperfect, it nonetheless stresses the importance of giving oneself wholly to God rather than to sin.

It would seem that Paul had predominately the Gentile Christians of Rome in mind with the second part of this verse. Prior to coming to faith they would have been, no doubt, part of a lifestyle of idolatry and depravity, which was culturally the norm in Rome at that time. So Paul reminds his readers that their Christian conversion involved a significant moral conversion as well, as we note again from these words of Paul: <<Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God>> (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

IV.c.ii.2 Romans 6:20-23 - Where the two roads lead

²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!

Romans 6:20-21

Paul continues to really push on the metaphor of slavery to sin, showing just how dangerous he

recognised it to be. These were concerns shared by the Lord himself: <<Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever>> (John 8:34-35). When the readers were unbelievers, they were totally captivated by sin, and the end result of such sin is death, physical and spiritual death are probably both in view here. Sin always brings destructive results in people's lives.

Paul's message is clear with regard to righteousness: that it is the effect of God's lordship over his creatures and cannot be realised otherwise. Hence, he can treat God and righteousness more or less as synonyms, since in the event of commitment and of continued obedience, he and his converts presumably experienced God as a constraining and enabling power.

²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

Romans 6:22

Christians have a new status and a new destiny. The verse to some may seem unbelievable on first inspection. Here we have God who, through no effort, ability or cost on our part takes away the heavy burden of sin we carry on our shoulders, i.e. you have been set free from sin: our guilt and our shame; he then gradually transforms us into something that is not just acceptable but seen in a state of holiness, and then gives us eternal life, free from pain, sorrow and all the issues that have plagued our lives, to be spent in perfect harmony with him and all the others who have answered the call.

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

Those who give themselves to sin will die both physically and eternally, whereas Christians are assured of eternal life.

Wages implies that the punishment for sin is what one has earned and what one deserves for their own sins. Death is the same due and expectation of a sinner, as wages are to a worker who has fulfilled his duty, and there is no sin that is venial, death is the wages due for what we may consider to be the least of sins.

Paul's antagonism to impurity is not merely the cultural antipathy to pagan values of one born and bred a Jew. It is rather a theological insight or claim that impurity involves such a focusing of vitality on their mortal body that when death has its say with respect to this same body nothing is left; the whole person is so reduced to this body that death alone is the end. This is how the slave master 'sin' rewards his servants; the only payment 'sin' has to offer is death.

The free gift of God is the opposite of something one deserves, which fits Paul's earlier emphasis on justification by grace alone, i.e. God's unmerited favour; see the comments made on Romans 4:16. Through faith alone, i.e. trusting in Christ for justification: <<For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith">> (Romans 1:17). Also see Romans 3:21-4:25. It is a free gift as God is not and will never be in anyone's debt. The term free gift denotes that eternal life is both an act of grace and itself an embodiment of that same grace. In other words, it is not something that leaves the possession of the giver and becomes the possession of the one in receipt of the gift. It is rather a relationship sustained by God's out-flowing power of goodness and embodying of that same goodness in its whole character. As such it will still be in terms of life in Christ (v.23), or life with Christ (v.8), and involve the believer's obedient response to his lordship: <<By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all

integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear>> (Isaiah 45:23), <<It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God'" >> (Romans 14:11), and: <<Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father>> (Philippians 2:9-11).

We see from the Gospel that the converse to what the master 'sin' has to offer is holiness, which ends in eternal life, where holiness is probably more clearly conceived as a process, that is, the progressive transformation from inside out, so that the final rising with Christ is but a continuation and completion of the whole process: <<Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come>> (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5).

The richer dimensions of Paul's theology, which lies behind the thought here, the progressive transformation of the believer into the image of the crucified and Risen Lord, might not be familiar to many of the Roman Christians, although it is part of Paul's fuller Adam Christology. But at least those who had been following Paul's train of argument would recognise that the eternal life here spoken of is nothing other than the life with Christ already spoken of (v.8). For Christ is the only one who has died and has risen again in his own right and so dies no more, therefore, that eternal life is simply a sharing in the unending risen life of Christ.

Sin has perhaps led us along a steep, rocky path but by renouncing it and turning to Christ, we will find the path may be no less treacherous but the destination will be eternal heaven, even though we merit hell! Such is the generosity of the gift of grace.

As a good 1st Century Jew, and his Christian theology has not changed his view, only deepened it and filled it out, Paul believed that there were two ages: the present age, and the age to come, often translated as eternal life in Paul's letters. The present age: <<who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father>> (Galatians 1:4), was a time when wickedness continued to rule God's world. In the age to come, God's rule would triumph at last. The achievement of Jesus as the Christ of God had brought this age to come forwards into the middle of this present age. Christians were summoned to live in the present age in light of that future, that future which had come to meet them in Jesus. Paul elaborates on this with these words: <<I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently

(Romans 8:18-25). That vision of new creation, not some expectation of a disembodied and timeless 'heaven', is where genuine Christian behaviour will lead.

Paul never mentions heaven as being some place far off in the galaxy, but implies more of our resurrection to a renewed heaven and earth: <<Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind>> (Isaiah 65:17), <<"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure">> (Isaiah 66:22), <<But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness>> (2 Peter 3:13), and: <<Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea>> (Revelation 21:1), to be given at a time when God has removed all the corruption and decay caused by millennia of sin and abuse. However, heaven is and remains our reward, not something we are given in reward for services but a free gift, purchased and prepared personally by Jesus: <<In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you>> (John 14:2), but note that he also prepares us to go there as well, in order to make us acceptable to appear before the throne of grace. That is the free gift; a gift of pure grace and a gift that is only available by the power of God and through the love of Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In short, accepting Jesus Christ as Lord, the point at which the present train of thought began, demonstrated by the believer's baptism, is not an isolated and once and for all event in its character of grace meeting obedience. Rather, for Paul, that first act characterises the whole of the believer's life as a believer. The newness of life there entered upon must be received as a free gift of grace, not as something due or earned as of right, and it must be received over and over again throughout life in this mortal body, and beyond in the fullness of resurrection life. The identification with Jesus in his death must be reaffirmed over and over again, and this does not just mean participating in periodic communion services, and continues until death plays its last card, when at last the believer can know identification with Jesus in his resurrection. The obedience of first commitment must be repeated in every decision of any moral consequence, so that it may increasingly be an obedience which results in righteousness; a righteousness which results in sanctification; a sanctification which results in eternal life. Amen.